

BELIEVERS TESTED BY TRIALS

NO. 2732

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 23, 1901
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him:
on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him:
he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him:
but he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”*
Job 23:8-10

JOB, as we noticed in our reading, was at that time in very deep distress. I commend this fact to the notice of any here who are very sorely tried. You may be the people of God and yet be in a terrible plight, for Job was a true servant of the Most High, yet he sat down among the ashes and scraped himself with a potsherd because he was covered with sore boils, and at the same time, he was reduced to absolute poverty.

The path of sorrow has been trod by thousands of holy feet—you are not the first one who could sit down and say, “I am the man that has seen affliction.” You were not the first tried one, you are not the only one, and you will not be the last one. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” So let this be some comfort to you—that you are one of the Lord’s suffering children, one of those who have to pass through rough roads and fiery places in the course of their pilgrimage to heaven.

Job had to experience one trial which must have been very keen indeed, for it was brought about by his three choice friends, who were evidently men of mind and mark, for their speeches prove that they were by no means second-class men. Job would not have selected for his bosom friends any but those who were of high character, estimable in disposition, and able to converse with him upon high and lofty themes.

Such, no doubt, those three men were and I expect that when Job saw them coming towards him, he looked for a store of comfort from them, imagining that they would at least sympathize with him and pour out such consolations as their own experience could suggest, in order that he might be somewhat relieved. But he was utterly disappointed—these friends of his reasoned that there must be some extraordinary cause for such unusual distress as that into which Job had fallen. They had never seen wrong in him, but then, he might be a very cunning man and so have concealed it from them.

As long as they had known him, he seemed to be a generous, liberal soul, but perhaps, after all, he was one of those who squeeze the uttermost farthing out of the poor. They could not read his heart, so they put the worst construction upon his sorrows and said, “Depend upon it, he is a hypocrite. We will apply caustic to him and so we will test him, and see whether he really is what he professes to be. We will rub salt into his wounds by bringing various charges against him.” And they did so in a most horrible fashion.

That is a cruel thing for anybody to do and one that cuts to the quick. Possibly, some people who used to court your company and would not let you go down the street without bowing to you—now that your circumstances are changed, do not recognize you. Or if they cannot help seeing you, they appear to have some distant recollection that, years ago, you were a casual acquaintance, or, perhaps, if they do speak in a kind, friendly way, though their words are smoother than butter, war is in their heart—though their words are softer than oil, yet are they drawn swords.

You must be a bad man because you have come down in the world—it cannot be that you are the respectable person they thought you were, or you would not have lost your estate, for, in the estimation of some folk, to be respectable means to have a certain amount of cash. The definition was once given, in a court of law that if a man kept a carriage and one horse, it was proven, by that fact that he was respectable.

That is the way of the world—respect and respectability depend upon so much money, but the moment that is gone, the scene changes. The man is the same—ay, he may be a better and a nobler man without the money than with it—but it is only noble men who think so. It is only right-minded persons who judge not by the coat or the purse, but who say, with Burns,

“A man’s a man for a’ that,”—

whatever may be his condition. Character is the thing to which we ought to look—the man himself and not merely his surroundings. But Job had to bear just that ignoble sort of scorn that some men seem to delight to pour upon the sorrows of others.

I want, first, to call your attention to *Job’s desire in the time of his trouble*. It was his earnest desire to get to his God. Secondly, we will notice *Job’s distress because he could not find Him*. “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him.” And thirdly, we will consider *Job’s consolation*, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

I. First, then, notice JOB’S DESIRE IN THE TIME OF HIS TROUBLE.

He wanted his God. He did not long to see Bildad, or Eliphaz, or Zophar, or any earthly friend—his cry was, “Oh, that I knew where I might find HIM! that I might come even to his seat!” This is one of the marks of a true child of God—that even when God smites him, he still longs for His presence. If you get to the very back of all Job’s calamities, you will see that God sent them, or, at least, permitted Satan to afflict him. “Yet,” says Job, “I will not turn in anger against God because of this. ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ Let Him do what He will with me, I will still seek to get near to Him and this shall be my heart’s desire, ‘Oh that I knew where I might find him.’”

An ungodly man, if he has made any pretense of fellowship with God in his days of prosperity, forsakes Him as soon as adversity comes. But the true child of God clings to his Father however roughly He may deal with him.

We are not held captive to God by a chain of sweets, nor are we bought with cupboard love, nor bribed in any other way to love Him, but now, because He first loved us, our heart has loved Him, and rested in Him—and if cross providences and strange dealings come from the hand of the Most High, our cry shall not be, “Oh that we could get away from him!” but, “Oh that we knew where we might find Him, that we might come even to His seat!” This is the mark of our regeneration and adoption—that, whatever happens, we still cling to our God.

For, beloved friends, when a man is in trouble, if he can but get to God, in the first place, *he is quite sure of justice*. Men may condemn us falsely, but God never will. Our character may be cruelly slandered and doubtless, there have been good men who have lived for years under false accusations—but God knows the way that we take. He will be the Advocate of His servants when their case is laid before the heavenly Court of King’s Bench. We need not be afraid that the verdict will not be just—“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

We also know that if we can get to God, *we shall have an audience*. Sometimes men will not hear us when we are pleading for justice. “I do not want to hear a word you have to say,” says the man who is so prejudiced that he will not listen to our plea. But there is an ear that no prejudice ever sealed. There is a heart that is ever sympathetic towards the griefs of a believer. You are sure to be heard, beloved, if you pour out your heart before the God that hears prayer. He will never be weary of your cries—they may be poor, broken utterances, but He takes the meaning of the sighs of His saints, He understands the language of their groans. Go, then, to God because you are sure of an audience.

What is more, in getting near to God, a man is *sure to have strength*. You notice how Job puts it—“Will He plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.” When once we get to realize that God is with us, how strong we are! Then we can bear the burden of want or of pain, or even the sharp adder’s tongue of slander. The man who has God with him is a very Samson—he may fling himself upon a troop of Philistines, and smite them hip and thigh. He may lay hold of the pillars of their temple, rock them to and fro, and bring down the whole building upon them. I say not that we shall work miracles, but I do say that, as our days, so shall our strength be.

*“I can do all things, or can bear
All sufferings, if my Lord be there.”*

And once more, he who gets to his God is *sure of joy*. There was never a soul that was right with God and that was unhappy in the presence of God. Up yonder in glory, how gladly they smile! How I would like to photograph their beaming faces! What a group that would be—of angel faces bathed in everlasting light and the faces of those redeemed from among men—all radiant with celestial joy. What gives them that gladness? It is because God is there that they are so happy.

*“Not all the harps above
Can make a heavenly place,
If God His residence remove,
Or but conceal His face.”*

Just as the sun makes the landscape bright and fair, so does the light of God’s countenance make all His people glad. It would not matter to a man whether he were in a dungeon or a palace if he had the constant presence of God. I am not speaking at random when I make that assertion. Read the record of the martyr days of the church and you will understand that the presence of God caused His persecuted people to be the happiest in the whole world.

No minstrels in royal halls ever sang so sweetly as did the prisoners of the Lord who were confined in deep, dark, underground dungeons, where they could scarcely breathe. No, that is not all, for some have been happy even on the rack. Think of brave Lady Anne Askew sitting on the cold stones after the cursed inquisitors had torn her poor feeble frame almost limb from limb—and when they tempted her to turn from the faith, she answered,

*“I am not she that lyst
My anker to let fall
For every dryslynge mist;
My shippe’s substancyal.”*

Some who were tortured, not accepting deliverance, declared, as in the case of Lawrence, that the gridiron was a bed of roses and that they never were so joyous as when their body was being consumed in the fire—every finger being like a lighted candle—for they were able, even then, to cry, “None but Christ! None but Christ!” It is amazing how the presence of God seems to be an anodyne that kills all pain—an uplifting, like an angel’s wing, that bears upward one who, without it, would be utterly crushed. The martyr is torn in pieces and full of agonies—and yet all his sufferings are transformed, till they become sweet harmonies of intense delight because God is with him.

Oh! give me God, give me God, and I care not what you withhold from me. “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

II. The brightness of the first part of my subject will help to make the second portion all the darker. We are now to consider JOB’S DISTRESS—the agony of a true child of God who cannot find his Father.

Your experiences are not all alike, brethren, and I do not want you to try to make them all alike. Some of you have very happy experiences and very little spiritual trial. I am glad it is so. I only hope you will not be superficial, or conceited, or censorious of others.

But there are some who know the darker paths in the heavenly pilgrimage, and it is to those that I specially speak just now. Dear friends, I pray you to remember that a man may be a true servant of God and even an eminent and distinguished servant of God like Job, and yet he may sometimes lose the light of God's countenance and have to cry out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

There are some special, superfine, hot-pressed Christians about, nowadays, who do not believe this. They say, "You ought to be joyous. You ought never to be depressed—you ought to be perfect." All which is quite true, but it is a great deal easier to say so than to show how it is to be realized. And these brethren, who talk as if it were a very simple matter, like counting your fingers, may some day find that it is more difficult than they think—as some of us have sometimes done.

Job could not find his God—this is *apparently strange*. He was a specially good man, one who did what he could for all around him—a very light in the city where he dwelt—a man famous in all the country, yet in great trouble—one might have thought that God would certainly comfort him. He has lost everything. Surely, now, the Lord will return to him, and be gracious to him, and above all other times he will be cheered now with the presence of God. Yet it was not so. He was a man who valued the company of God and who cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Yet he could not find Him. It is passing strange, or at least, it appears to be so.

Yet notice, next, that *it is essentially needful to some trials that God should withdraw the light of His countenance*. Our Lord Jesus Christ, with all the woes that He endured, could not have been made perfect through sufferings unless He had learnt to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" When God means to smite any child of His with the rod, He cannot do it with a smile. Suppose a father is chastening his son and all the while is comforting him—where is the chastening? No, the very essence of the medicinal sorrow that is to do good to our souls will lie in our having to bewail the absence of the smile of God.

This is essential to our trial, but *it is greatly perplexing*. I do not know of anything that so troubles a Christian man as when he does not know where his God is. "God is everywhere," says one. I know He is, but yet there is a special presence which He manifests to His people and sometimes it seems to them as if He were nowhere at all. So Job exclaimed, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him."

Tried children of God, you have had this experience and it is very perplexing because, when you cannot find your God, you cannot make out why you are being troubled. An affliction that will talk is always a light one, but I dread most of all a dumb affliction that cannot tell me why it has come. When I look around it, and ask, "Why is this?" and I cannot get an answer, that is what plagues me much.

And when you cannot find God, you do not know what to do, for, in losing Him, you have lost your Guide. You are in a maze and know not how to get out of it. You are like a man in a net—the more you pull this way or that—the more you tighten the bonds that hold you prisoner. Where you hoped to have relieved yourself, you only brought yourself into further difficulties in another direction—and this bewilderment is one of the worst of sorrows.

The loss of God's presence is also *inexpressibly painful to a believer*. If you can live without God, I am afraid you will die without God. But if you cannot live without God, that proves that you are His, and you will bear me out in the assertion that this is the heaviest of mortal griefs—to feel that God has forsaken you and does not hear your prayer—nay, does not seem even to help you to pray, so that you can only groan, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!...Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him."

Then, dear friends, in closing what I have to say about this dark side of the subject, let me remind you that *it is marvelously arousing*, because the true child of God, when he finds that his Father has forsaken him for a while, gets to be terribly unhappy. Then he begins to cry and to seek after God. Look

at Job—he hunts for God everywhere—forward, backward, on the left hand, on the right hand. He leaves no quarter unvisited. No part of the earth is left without being searched over that he might find his God. Nothing brings a real Christian to his bearings, and awakes all his faculties, like the consciousness of his Lord's absence. Then he cries, "My God, where are You? I have lost the sense of Your presence. I have missed the light of Your countenance."

A man, in such a case as this, goes to the prayer meeting in the hope that other people's prayers may help to make his sad heart happy again. He reads his Bible, too, as he has not read it for months. You will also find him listening to the Gospel with the utmost eagerness and nothing but the Gospel will satisfy him. At one time, he could listen to that pleasant kind of talk that lulls the hearers to sleep, but now he needs a heart-searching ministry, and a message that will go right into him and deal faithfully with him—and he is not content unless he gets it.

Besides this, he is anxious to talk with Christian friends of riper experiences than his own, and he deals seriously and earnestly with these eternal matters which, before, he perhaps trifled with as mere technicalities. You see a man, who once lived in the light of God's countenance, and you will find him wretched indeed when the light is gone. He must have his God.

III. Now, lastly, I want to speak, for a little while, concerning THE TRIED BELIEVER'S CONSOLATION. It is a very sweet consolation—"He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

God knows and understands all about His child. I do not know His way, but He knows mine. I am His child and my Father is leading me, though I cannot see him, for all around me, it is so misty and dark. I can scarcely feel His hand that grasps my little palm, so I cry to Him, "Where are You, my Father? I cannot see my way. The next step before me threatens to plunge me into imminent peril. I know nothing, my Father, but You know."

That is just where knowledge is of most use—it does not so much matter what you do not know so long as God knows, for He is your Guide. If the guide knows the way, the traveler under his care may be content to know but little. "He knoweth the way that I take."

There is nothing about you, my brother, which God does not perfectly understand. You are a riddle to yourself, but you are no riddle to Him. There are mysteries in your heart that you cannot explain, but He has the clue of every maze, the key of every secret drawer, and He knows how to get at the hidden springs of your spirit. He knows the trouble that you could not tell to your dearest friend, the grief you dare not whisper in any human ear.

I find that the Hebrew has this meaning, "He knoweth the way that is in me." God knows whether I am His child or not—whether I am sincere or not. While others are judging me harshly, He judges me truly—He knows what I really am. This is a sweet consolation. Take it to yourself, tried believer.

Next, *God approves of His child.* The word "know" often has the meaning of approval and it has that sense here. Job says, "God approves of the way that I take." When you are in trouble, it is a grand thing to be able to say, "I know that I have done that which is right in the sight of God, although it has brought me into great trial. 'My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.'" If you have a secret and sure sense of God's approval in the time of your sorrow, it will be a source of very great strengthening to your spirit.

But Job meant more than this. He meant that *God was considering him—and helping him even then.* The fact that He knows of our needs guarantees that He will supply them. You remember how our Lord Jesus Christ puts this truth, "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things."

Does He know all about our need? It is all right then—the Head of the house knows the need of all the members of His family, and that is enough, for He never yet failed to supply all the wants of those who depend upon Him. When I need guidance, He will Himself be my Guide. He will supply me when I lack supplies, He will defend me when I need defense, He will give me all things that I really require.

There is an old proverb that says, “Where God is, nothing is lacking,” and it is blessedly true. Only remember that there is an ancient precept with a gracious promise attached to it, “Delight thyself also in the LORD, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” Believe it, and obey it, and you shall find it true in your case.

Furthermore, when Job says, “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold,” he comforts himself with the belief that *God times and manages all things*—that his present distresses are a trial by which God is testing him. A man who is like solid gold is not afraid to be tested. No tradesman is afraid to put into the scales that which is full weight, for if it is weighed, it will be proved to be what he says it is.

When the inspector of weights and measures comes round, the gentleman who does not like to see him is the man of short weights and incorrect scales. He who knows he is upright and sincere dares say even to the Lord, Himself, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my ways: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” We do not profess to be perfect, but we dare claim to be sincere, and he who is sincere is not afraid of being tested and tried.

Real gold is not afraid of the fire—why should it be? What has it to lose? So Job seems to say, “I know that God has put integrity within my spirit and now that He is testing me, He will not carry the test further than, by His grace, I shall be able to bear.”

Lastly, Job’s comfort was that *God secures the happy result of trial*. He believed that, when God had tried him, He would bring him forth as gold. Now, how does gold come out of the crucible? How does a true Christian come out of the darkness and obscurity of missing his God for a while? How does he come out like gold? In the Hebrew, the word has an allusion to the bright color of the gold, so, when a Christian is tried, is there not a bright color upon him? Even though he may have lost, for a while, the bright shining of God’s countenance, when that brightness returns, there is a luster about him which you cannot help seeing.

He will speak of his God in a more impressive way than he ever spoke before. Examine the books that are most comforting to believers and that satisfy their souls, and you will find that the men who wrote them were those who had been severely tried—and when they came out of the fire, there was a brilliance upon them which would not otherwise have been there. If you walk in darkness and see no light, believe that, when God has tried you, you shall come forth with the brightness of newly-minted gold.

But brightness is of little value without preciousness, and the children of God grow more precious through their trials, and being precious, they become objects of desire. Men desire gold above almost everything else, yet the Lord has said, “I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.” There are some godly men whose company we court and some Christian women whose society, when they talk of spiritual things, is worth a Jew’s eye to one that is in distress. Happy are they whom God has passed through the fire, who become precious and desirable when they come out of it.

And they become honorable, too. “When he hath tried me,” said Job, “even though my friends despise me now, when I come forth, they shall have different thoughts concerning me.” They thought a great deal more of Job when God was angry with them and would not restore them to His favor until the patriarch had prayed for them—than they thought of him when they went to find fault with him. And the day shall come to you, true child of God, when those who now persecute you and look down upon you, shall look up to you. Joseph may be cast into the pit by his brothers and sold into Egypt, but he shall yet sit on the throne, and all his father’s sons shall bow before him.

Once more, you shall come out of the fire uninjured. It looks very hard to believe that a child of God should be tried by the loss of his Father’s presence and yet should come forth uninjured by the trial. Yet no gold is ever injured in the fire. Stoke the furnace as much as you may, let the blast be as strong as you will, thrust the ingot into the very center of the white heat, let it lie in the very heart of the flame—pile on more fuel, let another blast torment the coals till they become most vehement with heat—yet the gold

is losing nothing, it may even be gaining. If it had any alloy mingled with it, the alloy is separated from it by the fire and to gain in purity is the greatest of gains.

But the pure gold is not one drachma less. There is not a single particle of it that can be burnt. It is still there, all the better for the fiery trial to which it has been subjected. And you, dear child of God, whatever may befall you, shall come out of the fire quite uninjured. You are under a dark cloud just now, but you shall come out into brightness and you shall have lost nothing that was worth keeping. What is there that you can lose? When death comes, what will you lose?—

*“Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.”*

When we put on our new clothes, this body that shall have passed through God’s transforming hand—shall we be losers? No, we shall say, “What a difference! Is this my Sabbath garment? The old one was dark and dingy, dusty and defiled. This is whiter than any fuller could make it and brighter than the light.” You will scarcely know yourselves, my brothers and sisters. You will know other people, I daresay, but I think you will hardly recognize yourselves when once you have put on your new array.

You cannot really lose anything by death. You will not lose the eyes you part with for a while, for, when Christ shall stand at the latter day, upon the earth, your eyes shall behold him. You shall lose no faculty, no power, but you shall infinitely gain even by death itself—and that is the very worst of your enemies, so that you shall certainly gain by all the rest. Come then, pluck up courage and march boldly on. Fear no ghosts, for they are but specters—there is no reality about them.

Beloved, note well this closing word. *God is here.* You need not go forward to find Him, or backward to hunt after Him, or on the left to search for Him, or on the right to see him. He is with His people still, as He said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when you walk through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

Oh, seek Him, then, every one of you, and God bless you all, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOB 23 AND 24

Always remember, dear friends, that one of the great lessons of the Book of Job is this—that we may never judge a man’s character by his condition. The best of men may have the most of suffering and of poverty, while the worst of men may prosper in everything. Do not imagine because a man suddenly becomes very poor or a great sufferer, that therefore he must be a great sinner—otherwise, you will often condemn the innocent, and you will, at the same time, be guilty of flattering the wicked. Job’s friends had cruelly told him that he must be a hypocrite, or else he would not have lost his property and have been smitten with such a remarkable sickness. So he appeals to God against their unrighteous judgment.

Job 23:1-2. *Then Job answered and said, Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.*

“Although my groaning is heavy, yet it is not so burdensome as my griefs might warrant.”

3. *Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!*

“To His judgment seat, that I might plead my cause and vindicate my character even there.”

4-6. *I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power?*

“Being the great God, will He silence me by a display of His omnipotence? Oh, no! He is too just to do that.”

6. *No; but he would put strength in me.*

“He would help me to argue my case. He would deal fairly with me. He would not be like you so-called friends of mine, who sit there and exult over my weakness and my griefs, and torture me with your cruel words.”

7-10. *There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered forever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take:*

“If I cannot find Him, or see him, He can see me, and He knows all about me.”

10. *When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

This is beautiful faith on the part of Job. It is very easy for us to read these lines and to say, “No doubt, tried men do come out of the furnace purified like gold,” but it is quite another thing to be in the crucible ourselves and to read such a passage as this by the light of the fire, and then to be able to say, “We know it is true, for we are proving its truth even now.”

This is the kind of Chapter that many a broken heart has to read by itself alone. Many a weeping eye has scanned these words of Job and truly blessed has that troubled one been who has been able to chime in with the sweet music of this verse, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

11. *My foot hath held fast to his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.*

It is a great thing to be able to say that, as Job truly could, for we have the witness of the Spirit of God that Job was “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” It was not self-righteousness that made him speak as he did—he had the right to say it and he said it.

12-13. *Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

“His mind is made up to chasten me. He means to afflict me again and again, so what can I do but yield to His will?”

13. *And what his soul desires, even that he doeth.*

There is, on Job’s part, a reverential bowing before the supreme power—an acknowledgment of God’s right to do with him as He wills.

14. *For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.*

“More arrows to pierce me, more sorrows to grieve me.”

15-17. *Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.*

He wished that he had died before those evil days had come upon him; and that is the way that a good man, an undoubted saint of God, is sometimes driven to speak. There are, perhaps, some who will say, “Then we don’t want to be children of God if that is how they are tried.” Ah! but that was only the sorrow of an hour. See where Job is now. Think of what he was even a few days after he made this mournful complaint, when God had turned his sighing into singing, and his mourning into morning light.

In the next chapter, Job speaks of those who were the reverse of himself—wicked and ungodly men who, nevertheless, prospered in this life.

Job 24:1. *Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?*

“Why do they live so long? Why do they appear to have such prosperity?”

2-4. *Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof. They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together.*

“They are hard-hearted enough to rob even poor widows and orphan children.”

5. *Behold, as wild asses in the desert, go they forth to their work;*

Like wild asses, their work consists in going forth to do mischief.

5. *Rising betimes for a prey: the wilderness yieldeth food for them and for their children.*

For there are some so hard that they would skin a flint and out of the wilderness would manage to get food. Yet such hard oppressors of others sometimes seem to prosper for a while.

6-12. *They reap every one his corn in the field: and they gather the vintage of the wicked. They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded cries out: yet God layeth not folly to them.*

He lets them alone, leaves them to do as they please. So it seems, but this is not the day of judgment, and this is not the place of final retribution. Now and then God flashes forth His anger against some gross sinner or some national crime, but as for the most of men's sins, He bears with them till that tremendous day shall come, which draws on apace, when He shall hang the heavens in sackcloth, and hold the last assize, and every man shall receive according to his works.

13-17. *They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguises his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.*

These are the men who plunder secretly, who rob, yet cannot bear to be known as thieves.

18. *He is swift as the waters; their portion is cursed in the earth:*

There was no curse upon Job, and no curse can come near the true child of God. His scanty portion is still blest. But the large portion of the ungodly is cursed even while he is on the earth.

18-20. *He beholdeth not the way of the vineyards. Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so does the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; the worm shall feed sweetly on him;*

What a sarcastic utterance! This man, who lorded it over others—how glad the worm shall be to get at him! This fat worldling shall be a rich feast for the worms.

20. *He shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be broken as a tree.*

It shall snap off and be brought to an ignominious end.

21-24. *He evil entreateth the barren that beareth not: and doeth not good to the widow. He draweth also the mighty away with His power: he riseth up, and no man is sure of life. Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.*

In the East, they generally reap their harvest by just taking off the tops of the ears of corn and leaving the straw. Thus will the wicked be cut off.

25. *And if it be not so now, who will make me a liar, and make my speech nothing worth?*

Job challenges all men to contradict what he affirms—that the righteous may be greater sufferers, and the wicked may for a while prosper, but that God will, in the end, overthrow the ungodly and establish the righteous.

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